A Link To The Past

Posted on



The Heritance Tea Factory, nestled in the Hill Country

It seems fitting that one of the most unique properties in the world would be found enshrouded in mist. The Heritance Tea Factory in Nuwara Eliya holds a deep connection with both the land and the past, and effectively makes those elements part of its own personality and charm.

Words Benjamin Fowler

Stepping inside the lobby, you would be forgiven for not noticing the offer of a fresh cup of spice tea as you gape at the lobby's many features. There's an abundance of vestiges from the building's past cleverly used for the interior design. Giant wheels and old machines abound. The metal girders and columns painted vivid shades of red and green contrast with the wooden floor. Parts of the building are more factory

than hotel. It exudes a warmth and cosiness that is a perfect respite from the cool mists outside.

The view of the factory from the outside doesn't prepare you for what's inside. That's because the corrugated metal sheets, the ample windows and the size of the place are all original, from when the tea factory was still in operation. All the machines within the structure are reminders of the building's past. Inside, I'm drawn towards the vintage elevator. It's the kind that the doors needed to be manually opened and closed. The hotel keeps the machinery as visible as possible, and even in the lobby, above your head axles rotate among the pipes in the ceiling.

In keeping with the original terminology, the hotel's floors are referred to as lofts rather than storeys. Much of the upper floors were used for withering the tea, and photographs on the wall illustrate the functions that went on in the factory previously. As the elevator rises up the lofts, it grants an amazing view of the main atrium – the central feature of the hotel. Two enormous fans face each other near the top. Originally used to bring air in and out of the factory in order to dry the tea, they are turned on for half an hour in the evening to bolster the factory atmosphere. The fans' large belts hang from the top of the atrium all the way down to the basement, where the original generator still sits, ready to operate.

The most substantive adjustment from changing the factory to a hotel was the need to support more weight – what was originally designed for bins of drying tea leaves wasn't going to support 54 fully-furnished rooms. The hotel's reverence for the building's past is illustrated by the way the old supports are coloured a deep green while the new fortifications and girders are red. The way the two colours mingle amidst the metal bars and teak wood is completely charming, and the red and green colour scheme is carried over throughout the hotel.

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In the dining room, a panorama is provided of Nuwara Eliya's peaks and valleys from three sides. Authentic tea chests, which had previously been used to transport the factory's tea around the world, are stacked together to form a surface for the buffet. The red and green motif from the lobby is also seen in the fabrics that adorn the tables and chairs in the dining room, providing a consistent style throughout the hotel.

To be even further immersed in the past, there's also the option to dine in the Railway Carriage Restaurant – an authentic railway carriage originally used for cargo transportation is now a dining destination. And as the station sign informs, at 6,850ft above sea level it is the most elevated railway carriage in Sri Lanka.

The train also comes alive. With the flick of a switch, a whistle blows and the train begins to chug, utilising machines underneath to imitate a train in motion, as a narrator describes part of the history of the tea industry. The way the silverware rattles with the train's pulsing rhythm is so convincing for a moment I thought we were actually moving.

For full immersion, there's no better place to go than the hotel's mini-factory, a short walk from the hotel that takes you past the Misty Mountain Spa, the putting green and a hedge maze perfect for high tea. Inside, master tea tasters show you step-by-step the individual machines used in the processing of tea, from withering to sorting. In fact, the hotel even offers excursions into the tea fields where you can pluck your own leaves to bring back to the mini-factory for processing.

It's not hard to see why this elegant hotel has received so much international acclaim. It was the only hotel to win a Grand award at the 2012 Pacific Asia Travel Association Awards, and was praised for making an eco-friendly world-class hotel out of a run down tea factory, while all the while retaining and fostering the history and culture of the area for all to see. The name 'Heritance', after all, is a portmanteau of 'inheritance' and 'heritage', demonstrating the hotel's reverence and commitment to the past.

Heritance Tea Factory

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